

Biologists in charge of hatching whooping crane eggs have learned to wear shrouds to prevent the baby cranes from developing a parent-human fixation. Experience has taught these educated mother hens that concealing their identity would reduce the hatching's disappointment late in life when they began to understand the difference between birds and humans. I suppose that hombres who spend 21 days hatching an egg have ample time to think up such things.

Shortgrass ranchers need to develop a similar disguise. Over 90 percent of the cattle out here think herders and pickups are their parents.

Last spring when everything was tough, you didn't have to leave the highway to see the old sisters affectionately licking pickup fenders. The attachment didn't reach the licking stage as far as the hombres were concerned. Come to think of it, I never did see anything that wanted to lick a Shortgrasser in his winter costume. Big bundles of blue denim wrappings just aren't conducive to tongue touching. Probably that explains why the foreign custom of bussing people on the cheek hasn't caught on in these parts. I'd guess that it'd take two squeeze chutes placed head-on to get even a nose touching tradition started.

Ghost clothes like the crane-hatchers wear would be handy to have on town ventures, also. The merchants in San Angelo look on us as their mothers, and have for years. Our money has been so easy to come by that they've developed cases of momism that would amaze Dr. Spock.

I get sort of embarrassed the way the storekeepers act when I'm cold trailing my wife through the department stores. Grown men ought to have more dignity. They shouldn't reach across counters to pat me on the arm or make big scenes kissing my ring. It isn't normal for grownups to act that way. I know it's a parent-pocketbook fixation, but they should show more reserve.

Saddle horses are the worst ones to catch false mother attachments. Twenty years ago my old listening horse, Blucher, began thinking the feedhouse was his mother. We'd be working six miles from the barn and he'd have his mind on the feed bucket or the feed trough. To this day, he isn't completely weaned; on a morning's run he'll travel an extra 14 miles nickering and looking back toward the house. His affliction is so bad, a camouflage expert couldn't change him.

Obtaining the right clothes to fool the old cows or the Angelo shopkeepers would be easy. Every day on the streets in San Angelo you can see folks dressed in fashions that certainly would be hard to confuse with somebody's mother. I've seen a number of late models that could cause complexes, but they wouldn't be the sort normally associated with motherhood.

Scientists hatching eggs are to be envied. As fast as life is, hatching whooping cranes should be a peaceful existence. However, everyone's game looks better from afar. Egg incubators are probably as much of a problem to clean as corrals are.